

Faculty of Design

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Kapsula

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ACTING OUT 2/3

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IT'S LIKE GOING TO THE GUN RANGE
WITH WORDS...



MICHAEL LYONS
& ASHLEE CONERY

On the Cover

JOSEPH PARIS

FEMEN protest
France

05 October 2012

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LIBERATING

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“I’m not interested in how people move but what moves them.”

Pina Bausch, *What Moves Me*, 2008

Our investment in performance demonstrates a shared impulse to connect corporeally. ACTING OUT may refer to a subversive gesture beyond tangible space, shaped by mental rather than physical engagement, but performance offers the writer relatability through the human body. Thus, we concede to a conversation about presence. People write best if they write what they know, and what can we know better than occupying our own body? Existentialist crises aside, the ebbs and flows between audience and performer emerge from a spatial connectedness—a temporal overlap in subjective experience.

Overlaps, axes and intersections are often mediated, however, and the notion of presence or being with another becomes complicated by the screen. Being in the same place at the same time is not limited to interaction “In Real Life.” The ubiquity of virtual space—especially those spaces built around the relationship between audience and performer—demands re-evaluation of the corporeal. Technological bodies supplement human

bodies, expanding the scope of phenomenological inquiry. Let us avoid a debate about the impacts of technological interventions on experience. ACTING OUT indicates movement. Rather than considering pros and cons, try to determine its direction.

It is productive being there and it is also productive not being there. Information about a place can be gained through empiricism or Google. Google Maps won’t tell you where your mom grew up, but it can tell you the distance in km from where your mom grew up to where you are standing right now. There are multiple sides to understanding place and presence through the body, and this acknowledgment is useful for the task at hand. When we begin to plot movement, self-location is paramount. It is impossible to grasp ACTING OUT without first turning inward. Thematics are the birth mother of conundrums.

Pina Bausch gets it. How many have seen the *Pina* documentary? We may use the film as exemplary of the para-

doxical elephant in the room (*the elephant is a hologram*). There is movement on screen and there is movement onto the screen, but nothing is moving. As Bausch notes, perhaps movement is not simply about the presence of the body. Reframing presence to incorporate psychological, emotional and immaterial being is a means of accessing performance and negotiating with the screen. The texts that follow think about the former and the latter, but no one knows which or in what order. Presence is the thread holding all of it together, and we are not necessarily talking about the contents of this issue.

Before beginning to think about movements on and off the screen, our suggestion is that you take a look at the bibliographic effort which immediately follows the scatter-brained introduction. We have compiled a list of items to be found at your local bookstore, video store or JSTOR that inform the dialogue between performance and performativity. We can’t teach you everything we know and we don’t know it all, so in a reflexive effort we direct you, ever so gently, outside.

—THE KAPSULA TEAM

A primer for performance art through a Canadian lens, that is by no means complete or claims to be anywhere near it...

However, it has been curated with our theme in mind. Performance art is often “out there”, but here are some especially useful references for moments when performance art has gone beyond the gallery and, on occasion, beyond institutional frameworks all together...

The KAPSULA

PERFORMANCE ART READER

Victor Wang in *Performa Magazine*, March 2013

< <http://performa-arts.org/magazine/entry/performing-around-capitalism-part-1> >
< <http://performa-arts.org/magazine/entry/performing-around-capitalism-part-2> >

And, for those with access, we recommend: Claire Bishop, “Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authority,” *October* 140 (Spring 2012): 91-112.



“The **CONTEMPLATION** *of* **CELESTIAL THINGS**

*will make a man both speak and think
more sublimely and magnificently
when he descends to human affairs.”*

Cicero

—Cicero

Micheal Lyons

This adage filters through my mind as I’m waiting, on a chilled late October evening, for the streetcar that, fifteen minutes ago, was supposed to come one minute ago. Two days previous the city and I suffered through a disappointing municipal election where the winner and runner-up believe that white privilege doesn’t exist and that you can be racist against people who eat little red apples, respectively. Yesterday I spent the day in bed with a mildly debilitating 24-hour stomach bug and I’m still feeling a bit wobbly. In about an hour I’ll be crammed in a hot, almost overcapacity room, wearing a double layered coat for some reason. I have class tomorrow morning and I still have readings to do, ditto Friday. I am moving on Saturday, my entire life in and out of a big truck; a small room to a smaller one.

Sometimes it’s hard to overcome the petty drama, emotional anxiety and physical limitations our strange little inconsequential bodies are shackled to. Sometimes it’s hard to transcend, to contemplate celestial things.

As I’m sitting in that cramped room, Cicero’s proverb comes to me once again. I wriggle around to pull a pencil out of my book bag and write it down at the front of my 7a*11d International Festival of Performance Art program. This, I think to myself, will be my frame. What better sentiment to sum up my feelings towards art as an audience member?

This kind of tension—between life and art, the material and the transcendental, tradition versus experimentation, ideals against compromises—seems to find a home at 7a*11d.

All photos courtesy of the Author,
except where otherwise noted.



I had the great fortune, in preview of the festival, to sit down for a conversation with artists claud wittman and Bazil AlZeri, and co-founder and collective member Shannon Cochrane. In their practices, processes and work, each of these artists wants to challenge something about how we experience art, and how performance art is practiced.

“Not specifically 7a*11d,” said AlZeri, “but 7a*11d is an international performance art festival that has a similar format as a lot of festivals around the world. There’s a kind of classic format of presenting something for 30 minutes, a number of set artists in an evening, or in the course of a day.” During our conversation, both AlZeri and wittman expressed similar sentiments. wittman explained that he’s been moving away from gallery-format presentations, choosing instead to take his work outside into the streets to directly engage with audiences. AlZeri, as well, said he tries to stay away from performing in white boxes. “Why does it have to be this 30 minute thing? People arrive from different countries, different cities, and it almost feels sometimes like they arrive with their bag of tricks and ‘here’s my performance, 30 minutes, okay, next one.’”

AlZeri presents his piece on the fourth evening of this year’s festival, which is not only performed in a white box, but fits the thirty-minute format as well. His piece is aptly titled *The Death of Performance Art*. AlZeri reenacts thirty-two performance art pieces, dating from 1982 to 2014, paced at about one per minute (with a little bit of wiggle time for a couple). He often draws on work that involves food, a medium he’s worked in previously, and what he creates is intense, messy and wonderful. As layers of food and objects are piled and poured (usually onto his own body), each new performative act emerges—an audience member is asked to give AlZeri \$50 for a pastry, soon after he asks someone to share a pastry with him (for no charge). In piece after piece AlZeri smears chocolate on his body. The absurdity of the work really had something to say about the actions of performers, and the role of the audience—what we create and what we gather to experience.

A number of the works I experience over the course of 7a*11d grapple with this tension. Clive Robertson’s *The Award*, which opens the evening performances on Wednesday, takes the role of a formulaic award ceremony. Introduction, highlights reel, presentation of an “eminence” award to Robertson himself, acceptance speech (given by Robertson’s sister, who believes he’s receiving an award for “some performing thing,” via video),



with a twist at the end when Robertson presents Berenicci Hershorn, as well, with an “eminence” award—to which she jumps up, grabs her award and delightfully cries out, “Can I keep it?” We all clap politely, there’s cheering, art sponsors are mentioned, etc.

What does art mean in today’s world that can seem so artless? I think of a reading I had done for a course earlier in the school semester during Marisa Hoicka’s work that first night (quotes seem to come to me quite a lot in these situations). Late communication theorist James Carey, in his book *A Cultural Approach to Communication*, explores the process of communication, which people mostly assume to be something mundane and utilitarian. We talk with each other in everyday life simply to navigate the world around us and get things done. “Things can become so familiar that we no longer perceive them at all,” writes Carey. “Art, however, can take the sound of the sea, the intonation of a voice, the texture of a fabric, the design of a face, the play of light upon a landscape, and wrench these ordinary phenomena out of the backdrop of existence and force them into the foreground of consideration.”

This resonated so fantastically with me because it made me think about the art that has truly affected me in my life—that kind of breathless, humbling, almost electrical connection. Impressionists’ paintings make me see the way light plays upon the land and bodies; science fiction authors tap into my anxieties about utopia and dystopia; didactic theatre engages my brain, bringing words and intellectual concepts to life before my eyes.

There could be no better example of this concept in action than Hoicka’s excellent piece, presented on the first night. In *Nature Morte*, the artist presents a traditional still life that wouldn’t be out of place in the work of a Dutch Master; fruits and vegetables arrayed prettily. She comes out in a full costume with her face covered and begins to rend the items on the table to shreds. She takes bites of grapes, though can’t actually swallow and their pulp falls out onto the table. She begins to tear apart fruit to, magically, find other household items beneath the rinds. Other foodstuff on the table comes alive



mechanically and soon the table is a writhing, evolving organism.

The familiar made alien. I am speechless, I can't even begin to articulate how marvelous Hoicka's piece is to watch, and what it means to me.

I come to 7a*11d as an outsider to the community. Beyond a few performances at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre's Rhubarb Festival, some slightly more dubious work at Nuit Blanche—which, in my mind, is always stapled over with "Scotiabank"—some YouTube videos of Marina Abramović sitting in a chair and a based on Marina Abramović sitting in a chair, I have little reference points to performance art other than the stereotypes. Even with this limited experience with the form I've come to understand something about it, personally: as an audience member there either is that electrical connection, or there's not.

Accessing and connecting with the work can be difficult, though. After the first evening I was sitting in class, looking through the 7a*11d program in anticipation of the next evening. A woman in the course commented on it, and I explained it was for a performance art festival. She immediately scrunched up her nose, bemused, "I just don't get performance art." That kind of reaction typically makes me want to wring the neck of the person I'm talking to. I want to scream, "Who cares? Did you feel anything?" I'd rather feel disgusted, or uncomfortable, or depressed, or worn down to a raw feeling, than want to walk out of a performance and be able to say, "That was good," and start thinking about what I'm going to have for breakfast tomorrow.

I would posit that some resistance to performance art is because much of the work can be a painful experience—emotionally, but also physically. This may not be enjoyable or pleasurable, but it really rubs at something raw and creates meaning through that.

The second night: in Christian Bujold's *In between*s he creates something that I'd call "unmusic," a series where vibration and movement in the room create feedback through a guitar and amp that quickly grows to a piercing pitch. While the sound is playing, he uses thin strips of wood that are broken against his body, in various iterations, really communicating tension. As an audience member I find my entire body straining, almost paralyzed at the feeling the artist creates. Bujold's piece is painful and, in a way, I love every minute of it. John Court's endurance piece that evening, as well... I could only watch it for a few minutes at a time.

And despite bodily limitations I did end up contemplating celestial things; I did get my electrical transcendent moments. I had two, both on the final day.

The first is Roberto de la Torre's site-specific piece created for the Artscape space. De la Torre leads the audience throughout the space, inside and out, digging. Sometimes the audience is helping him dig, and each time a new digging implement is uncovered. This leads everyone into the playground outside of the Artscape space, where clothes are dug up and hung around the jungle gym structures in a makeshift sculpture, with the portraits of forty-three missing Mexican students looking down on the proceedings. It may sound trite, but it is a singular, heart wrenching experience, and the audience members—especially the diggers—really have to work for it.

The second, actually following de la Torre's piece, is Aidana María Rico Chávez's work, specifically the opening. Chávez literally kisses her way around the inside circle of the audience, which is a wonderful thing to see. Speaking of making the familiar unfamiliar, she shows how something as simple as a kiss, through repetition, sound, speed, emotion and the individual audience member can mean so many different things: sexy, awkward, sweet, silly. This is only the prelude to her piece, but it is truly a joy to watch—if I didn't have a cold I would jump into the front row for my share of kisses like the man beside me.

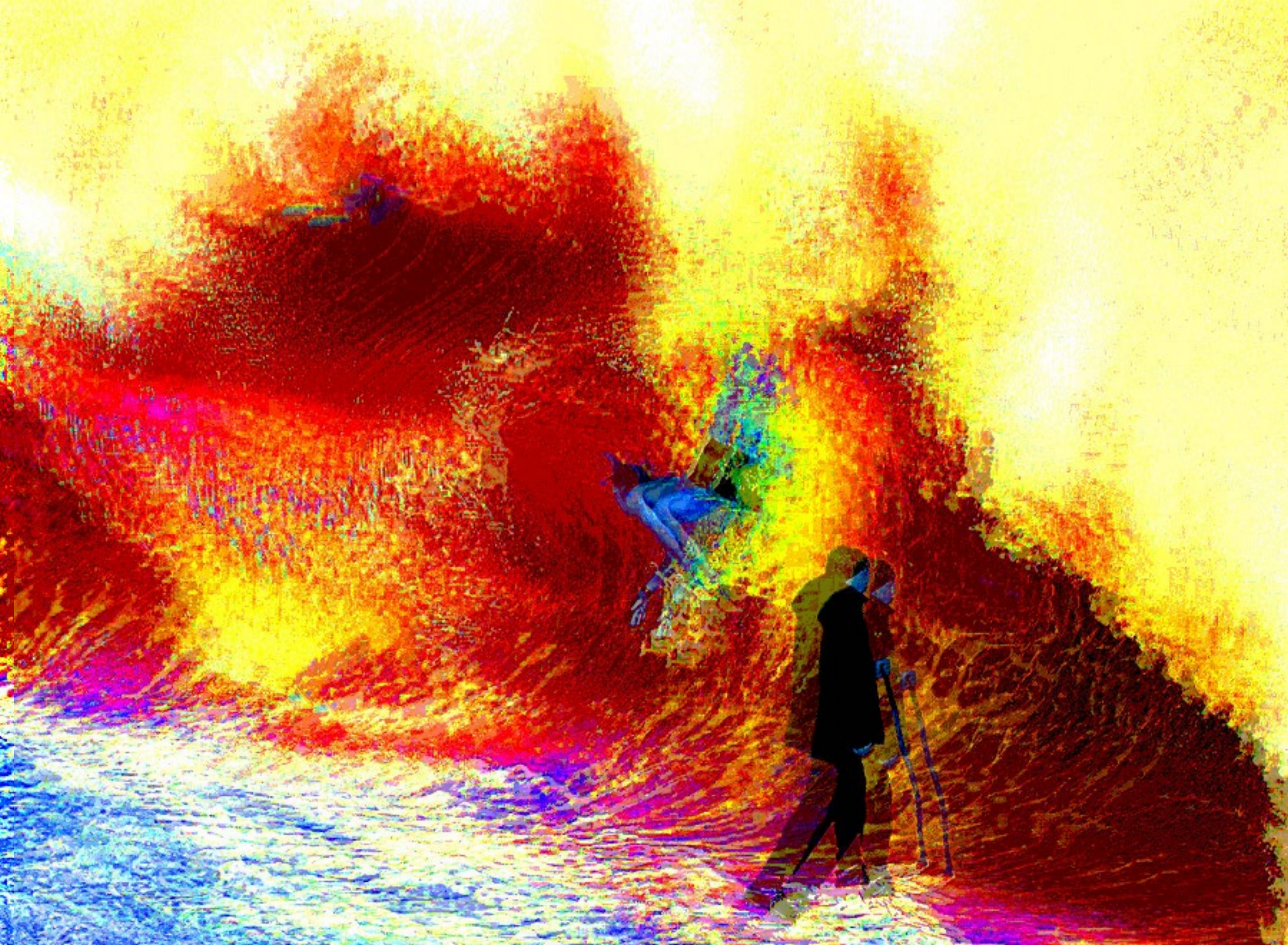
In the end, though, the piece that best sums up the incredible work I experienced at 7a*11d comes on the first night. Disappointing election, wobbly and a little feverish from illness, with school readings awaiting me at home, I settle in for Eduardo Oramas's *Felicitaciones/Congratulations*. This is one of the more surreal performances where, in each simple interaction, like trying to pin the tail on the donkey, trying to drink a glass of pop, or, most frustrating, trying to blow out the candles on a cake, the artist makes the task practically impossible for himself in different ways. The cake, for instance, is at one end of the room, candles burning merrily away, while Oramas is attached to the opposite end of the room with a bungee cord that just barely lets him get to the cake before pulling him backwards.

After multiple failed attempts to blow out the candles, the audience begins to cheer. Someone starts singing "Happy Birthday." Still, his task is impossible, futile. Watching it is exhausting as his body is slowly worn down. It's a bit insane, and fantastic. I watch the entire thing and walk out of there, deciding it's time to go home. I'm done contemplating celestial things, it's time for bed.



MICHAEL LYONS

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ARTISTIC AUTONOMY

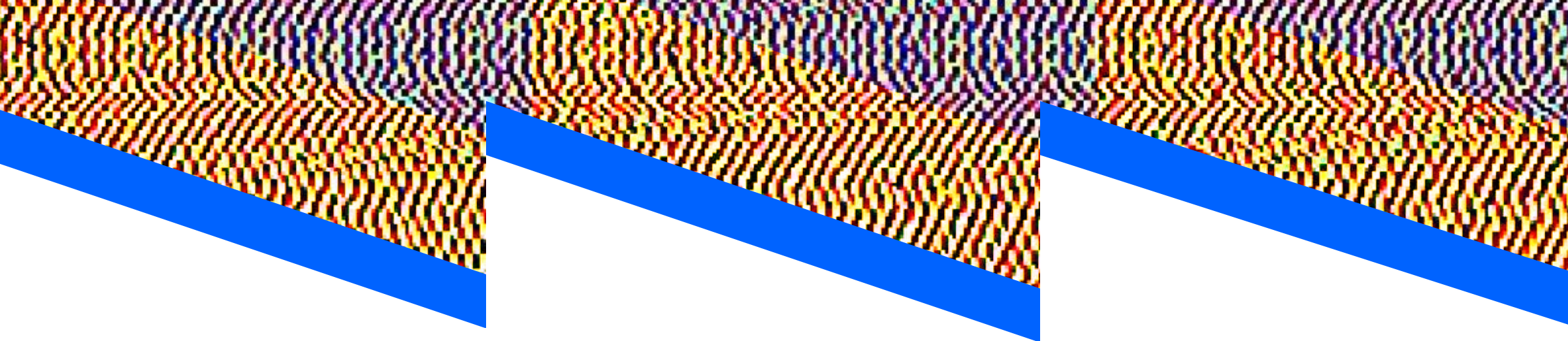
PRODUCTION & RECEPTION

ASHLEY CONNERY

Marcel Duchamp's *Rotary Glass Plates* (1920), Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's *Telephone Pictures* (1922) and Roy Ascott's *Change Paintings* (1959-61), each match points obscuring the division between artist and audience; performance and production; craft and creation. Artistic autonomy has been defined with terms such as 'mass-production' and 'immaterial labour.' Accelerating through the 21st century, the transformation or reversion of artists to the role of 'conceiver' has expanded the atelier to include teams of anonymous artists, factories and crematoriums (Xue Huang). Artistic autonomy appears in this climate as the result of artists' division from labour. Beyond employing designers and production lines, they are utilizing computers and the Internet to create art that exists outside of the physical world. The ease with which we can share, edit and add to information online has made it a platform for those who believe the creative process benefits from collaboration. This collaboration, however, goes beyond the production of ideas. Using an example from "YOU ARE BEING TIMED" at Zan Gallery in Paris, artist St Jean used an online locator to e-mail his drawing of a sculpture to an anonymous 'neighbour' with an at-home 3D printer. The 'neighbour'

printed the piece, making certain alterations to the surface that they deemed 'necessary' and met St Jean in a coffee shop who paid them for their work. The artist then collaborated with photojournalist Dwulit who appropriated the sculpture using projection mapping, which he captured in video and placed back on the Internet as documentation of the collaboration. Hybrid artistic practices such as this may be understood (simplistically) as the artistic response to collective online social behavior. The 'spectacle' (as defined by Guy Debord) becomes the action of exchange between people, artists and ideas from on to off-line. Artistic autonomy, in this environment, is therefore defined by its relaxed authorship; where value no longer resides in the attribution of a work to a single genius.

Though the dematerialization of art has been occurring for decades, evolving technology has extended this process to a realm beyond that of homogenous ready-mades. This realm encompasses the production of digital objects, online environments and altered documentation. Art viewed online may cease to exist, if it ever did outside of the digital realm. Artistic autonomy may have been



ushered in by the division of artists from labour, but its definition is not to be simplified to the creation of fiction or the dematerialization of art. While technology has confused the relationship between artist and materials, the online space facilitates the process by which art becomes art through cultural recognition of it as such. Therefore the Internet, and its vast audience (as I will discuss further), offers art autonomy from the academic and institutional realm.

One of the most profound shifts to occur in art is with regards to its documentation. Exhibiting documentation (video and photography) of performative, often interactive art exchanges (between artists' audience and/or objects) occurs both in the East and West dating back to the 1960s. Examples include Joseph Beuys' 1979 *Filz TV*, Marina Abramović's 1977 recording of sixteen hours without audience of *Relation in Time* and Tibor Hajas' 1976 *Self Fashion Show*. Collecting and exhibiting these traces has long been accepted by the curatorial world. In the absence of a traditional art object, documentation of a performance or work may assume its permanent place within the confines of a collection. However, with the introduction of the World Wide Web,

documentation became largely intangible and autonomous from institutions. This has affected the parameters for collecting works and re-defined 'live' performance and 'attendance' within exhibition making. Within certain artistic praxis this has resulted in autonomy from time and likewise the institution. Artists can now record their own actions, create their own online spaces in which to conduct exhibitions, tie them to Vimeo, SoundCloud, podcasts, image galleries and online chats. The uses of video, projection mapping and other forms of digital arts previously categorized into "multimedia arts" have been enveloped into (and accepted as common) artistic practice. Everyone with a phone now has the ability to record and edit sound and motion picture. This has allowed the public's interaction and recognition of art to include YouTube's of artistic process, performances and interactions with artists. By way of this exposure artistic production becomes integrated into its reception. These actions often occur outside of institutions, which are racing to catch up. They exist for all, not only the privileged few invited to or in town for the event. Funneled through the colloquialisms of online communication—art reaches audiences not only through the contrived format of 'curatorial speak' but in

the language of social media.

The Internet has also changed the context in which exhibitions are made. The documentation of an exhibition or an artistic exchange within a space (private, off-space, pop-up or institutional) now serves the long-term validation of an artist/curator or project. Images have in some cases circumvented attending the actual event, artist studio or fair. In 2014 Artsy partnered with Art Brussels inviting exhibitors to simultaneously show and sell work at the fair to viewers online. SAATCHI Online receives an estimated 73 000 hits per day, suggesting that both art collectors and amateur art lovers are interested in viewing work from the comfort of their own home. Their page entitled "One to Watch" has become a tool for many international curators who use it to source (questionably) "assured" new talent. The Internet has also allowed a range of institutions to reach wider audiences than ever before: The Louvre's collection is online for those unable to travel to Paris, "BP Spotlights" on both Tate's collections and installation shots from White Cube and community galleries around the world bring artists directly into people's homes, where they post, friend and share work, thereby enforcing its recognition as art and its value within

their social networks.

Duchamp's ready-mades certainly introduced the everyday into the art world, however, the Internet has increased the worth of peer validation, thereby increasing the potential for anyone or anything to be recognized as art. Paul O'Neill argues, curating, "by the 1980's... had been established as an entity of critical reflection in its own right," capable of determining the canonical importance of a work. The question is: has the potential for exposure regardless of curatorial attention diminished the necessity of having its validation? The answer depends on the interests of the viewer. If the viewers expectations are market or academically driven, certainly there is an argument for the curator's continued importance as a validator.

Artists at every stage of recognition are not asking themselves if they should engage online, but rather to what extent they should utilize the web, as audiences have become the linchpin to art's autonomy from the institution. Likewise, their attendance has become the bar by which the success of curators

is institutionally measured. However, as artists propel away from representational art, the act of exchanging an object (physical or digital) between an artist and a curator or institution (online or otherwise) remains where its "official" transformation into art is recognized. This is perhaps why sites like SAATCHI Online and Artsy find themselves incorporated into the system of middlemen inherent to the art world, rather than as tools of validation.

Artists' autonomy from the institution is tied to the autonomy of information online and available to audiences. When faced with art a viewer may reach into their pocket and use the technology available to them to interact, interpret and record art in whatever capacity suits them. This enables them as tastemakers, and empowers their collaboration in the artistic process, confusing authorship and displacing some of the validating power held by curators and institutions. Artists actually began exploring the impact of audience-controlled interaction with art long before the invention of the Internet. In 1924 Frederick Kiesler created the

"International Exhibition of New Theatre Technique" which used a series of T and L-shaped brackets to support a system of cantilevers that allowed the viewer to adjust paintings according to their own height. Roy Ascott believed that cybernetics created a continuum between audience and art in a mutually supportive system of communication. He saw this continuum as the way through institutional barriers between audiences and artists.

As audiences have moved online, so has art. This shift to virtual spaces coincides with the proliferation of apartment galleries, off-spaces and pop-up exhibitions, largely a response to the overhead expense of running a gallery. The potential for contemporary artists to create entirely outside of the institution is not inevitable, it is ongoing. Artistic autonomy is the result of the availability of technology, the freedom of information and platforms for limitless social engagement. Our acceptance of holistic culture, and collaborative forms of knowledge production has allowed art to explore autonomy from even the artist.

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[1] Wikipedia, "[Saatchi Gallery](#)." Website last updated November 2013.

[2] Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 5.

[3] Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 11.

